ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC

MAGAZINE

JOANNA MACGREGOR

April 1994

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MAGAZINE

EDUCATING musicians to the standard where they can offer themselves for employment is a key role of the Academy. Studying for a job - vocationalism is the ugly new word - has not troubled us as much as other parts of higher education. A commercial motive for study was spelled out in 1830 when the eight-year-old Academy was incorporated by Royal Charter, a document which also said the new Royal Academy of Music should "afford facilities for attaining perfection in the Science of Music". We don't have that nineteenth-century arrogance (or is it optimism?) and these days settle for excellence. But excellent musicianship, by itself, no longer guarantees a job. The bad news of recession has been compounded by the good news of increasing standards and visiting orchestra managers say that auditions have never been more demanding.

Today's young musicians need to be better equipped than ever before and the Academy has tuned its curriculum to harmonise with more competitive times. The most obvious example is the association with King's College which has enabled the replacement of the old diplomas with the BMus degreee course. Undergraduates have been working towards this qualification since 1991 and an MMus begins in September 1994.

Narrow and snobbish definitions of classical music have been abandoned and the widest possible range of music is included in degree studies. Period instruments, for example, were given a boost with the appointment of Christopher Hogwood as International Chair of Performance Studies. At the other end of the curricular scale contemporary music has been given due emphasis, its importance marked by the composer festivals which started back in 1984. Alfred Schnittke is the latest in a long line of distinguished visiting composers and his success is analysed by John Webb on page 21.

Generally contemporary music doesn't pay and there is plenty of space on Academy timetables for more profitable music. The dread word "commercial" no longer holds terrors of educational embarrassment and, unimaginable as it would have seemed even ten years ago, the Commercial Music course offers an introduction to TV, film and pop music. One proof of its endeavours will be on 22 April when the department is staging a concert in the Duke's Hall - click tracks, synthesisers and all.

Another musical boundary will be breached during the next academic year when teaching starts on a postgraduate diploma in Musical Theatre. The interview with the course tutor Mary Hammond on page 4 asserts: "In a world where there are more jobs to be had singing in Les Miserables, Phantom and Cats than Tosca, it makes sense for would-be performers to be equipped with a range of skills and styles." Few would disagree with such explicit vocationalism, and nobody would disagree that graduates need help in finding work. That's part of Janet Snowman's job ("helping them run their lives as little businesses," is her phrase for it) and her Music Box careers service will soon be enhanced by Apple Mac computers tooled up with the software to churn out CVs. The new THORN EMI Recording Studio contains yet more technology to symbolise a determination that there need be no chasm between study and employment. On page 23 THORN EMI's Claire Baker writes "we hope our investment will reinforce the links." We hope so too because every link to commerce is, if handled correctly, vital to a modern musical education.

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COVER PHOTO OF JOANNA MACGREGOR BY RICHARD KALINA

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The new Recording Studio

THE OFFICIAL inauguration of the new THORN EMI recording studio took place on 17th January, in the presence of Sir Colin Southgate, Chairman THORN EMI plc, and Rupert Perry, President and Chief Executive Officer EMI Records. This new facility is open to all Academy students and enables them to gain experience in an environment in which they may find themselves in their future careers and also to record CDs and tapes for auditions and professional opportunities.

Masterclasses

OVER recent months the Academy has welcomed many distinguished musicians to give masterclasses, concerts and recitals, among them Daniel Roth, Leonard Slatkin, Paul Silverthorne, Richard Hickox, Henryk Gorecki, Michael Kamen, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Karl Leister, Sibelius Academy Orchestra, Tamas Vasary, The Wallace Collection, Andrew Marriner, and the BBC Singers.

Sponsorship

THE ACADEMY is grateful to the Steel Charitable Trust, the Baring Foundation, the John Ellerman Foundation, the Grand Metropolitan Charitable Trust, the Leverhulme Trust, the Laura Ashley Foundation, the Wolfson Foundation, the Noswad Charitable Trust, the Kobler Trust, Guinness plc, the Princess Grace Hospital and 3i plc for their continued support. We also acknowledge with thanks the electronic equipment donated by Korg (UK) Ltd. Recent bequests have been received from the estates of Mrs E M G Crombie, Violet Wallace and Dilys Mary Lloyd and donations received in memory of John Walton and Marjorie Lempfert.

Music for Life

The Academy lends its name and support to a scheme spearheaded by the NUT to safeguard the subsidisation of peripatetic instrumental teaching in schools.

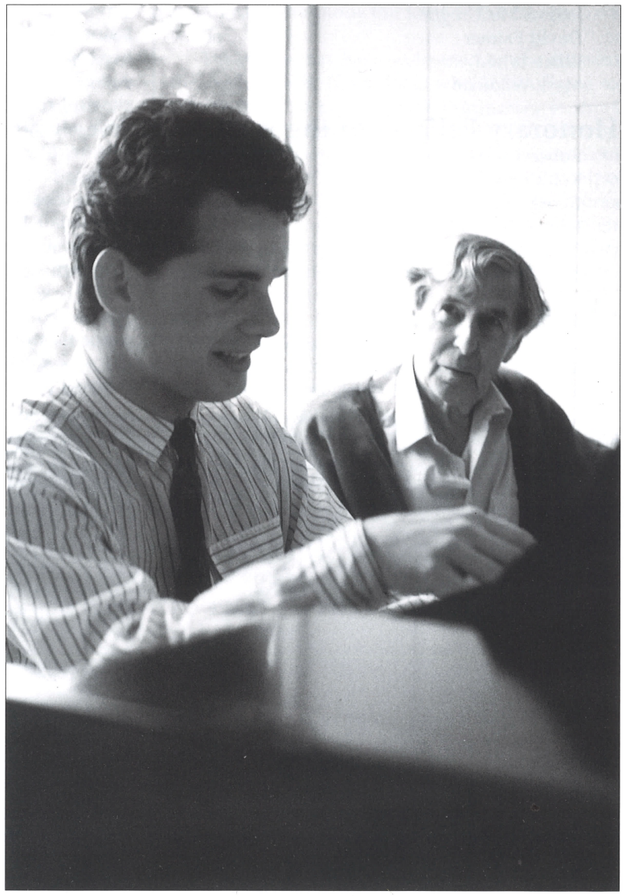
The Academy goes to Japan

The Royal Academy Sinfonietta, with Lynn Harrell and Xue-Wei, has just returned from a highly successful ten-day visit to Tokyo, during which they gave concerts and recitals at the Asahi Hamarikyu and Suntory Halls, the Canadian Embassy in aid of the Tokyo International Learning Community, the Zojoji Buddhist Temple and at the British Embassy.

This venture was a unique collaboration with the two main colleges in Tokyo, Toho Gakuen School of Music and the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music (Tokyo Geidai), including masterclasses at the two colleges, and the programme at Suntory Hall contained the first-ever joint performance between an Academy orchestra and the orchestra of Tokyo Geidai.

The visit would not have been possible without substantial financial assistance from the principal sponsors, Toyota Motor Corporation and BT Japan, and the associate sponsor, SG Warburg Securities (Japan) Inc.

MASTER AND PUPIL



Graham Caskie (left) at Sir Michael Tippett's home in Wiltshire. Following Graham's debut recording in April 1993, he met Sir Michael to discuss the Tippett Third Sonata. Last December he was invited back in preparation for his Park Lane Group recital in January, in which the Third Sonata was the centrepiece.

New Year Honours

- GCMG - Sir Rodric Braithwaite
- CH - Dame Janet Baker DBE HonRAM
- OBE - Howard Blake FRAM
- OBE - Erich Gruenberg HonRAM
- MBE - John Streets FRAM

Honorary Members of the RAM

- Mary Berry
- Graham Collier
- John Drummond
- Nicolai Gedda
- Piers Lane
- Andrew Marriner
- Valerie Masterson
- Ilya Musin
- Robert Spencer
- Toru Takemitsu

Fellows of the RAM

- Ray Allen
- Skaila Kanga
- Joanna MacGregor
- David Palmer
- Jillian White
- Mark Wildman

Honorary Fellows of the RAM

- Robert Carnwath
- Keith Erskine
- George Nissen
- John Reizenstein
- David Richards
- Peter Shellard

Deaths

We pay tribute to the memory of the following:

- Michael Meyerowitz ARAM
- Max Gilbert FRAM, 28th September 1993 (Member of Professorial Staff 1948-54)
- Yvonne de Rowen ARAM, 11th November 1993
- S James Saunders TD FCA HonFRAM, 16th November 1993 (Member of Committee of Management 1965-87; Member of Finance Committee 1967-82; Honorary Treasurer 1968-81; Vice-President 1981-9)
- Dr Chalmers Burns FRAM, 16th Nov 1993
- Sidney Griller CBE FRAM, 22nd November 1993 (Former member of Professorial Staff)
- Veronica Wagstaff (nee Brown) ARAM, 28th November 1993
- Prabhu Singh ARAM, 4th December 1993
- Alan Dalziel ARAM
- Mary Prees-Thomas (nee Hamlin) ARAM, 9th December 1993
- Hilda Bor FRAM, 10th December 1993
- Mary Jarred HonRAM, 12th December 1993
- Ralph Downes CBE HonRAM
- John Chambers ARAM, 12th January 1994
- Sir Ashley Clarke GCMG CVO HonFRAM, 20th January 1994 (Director and Member of the Governing Body 1967-84)
- Denise Lassimonne FRAM, 1st February 1994
- Norman Del Mar CBE HonRAM, 6th Feb 1994
- Rudolph Schwarz CBE HonRAM
- Witold Lutoslawski HonRAM, 8th Feb 1994

Setting a new course in Musical Theatre

Mary Hammond tells Jessica Duchen

about an explicitly vocational postgraduate diploma starting next September

IN A WORLD where there are more jobs to be had singing in Les Miserables, The Phantom of the Opera and Cats than in Tosca it makes sense for would-be performers not only to keep their options and their minds open but also to be equipped with the range of skills and styles that music theatre requires. The new two-year postgraduate course in musical theatre currently being prepared for the joint vocal faculty of the Royal Academy and Royal College of Music aims to develop vocal and performing abilities to the highest possible level.

The course is co-directed by Mary Hammond, a singing teacher with a wide range of performing experience behind her, and the producer Mike Ashman. It all began with an open day at the Academy, during which Mary Hammond, herself an Academy alumna, gave the then Principal Sir David Lumsden a piece of her mind about her training some 25 years ago. She and a number of her contemporaries had felt that they had made successful careers in singing beyond traditional classical repertoire despite rather than because of their education; Hammond explained that there was scant provision for the needs of students wishing to go into this field of performance after a formal, classical training. "You're just the person I need to talk to," said Sir David.

Any new course will reflect the interests of its founders, and Hammond says that she wants to integrate vocal and musical excellence with skills in movement, acting and projection. "To present it as music theatre is only a part of what I'm interested in," she says. "Nowadays we must produce a different kind of performer. That's it in a nutshell."

Mary Hammond , co-founder of the new course

Hammond says the course will involve intensive group effort. Students applying for the course need to be "vocally excellent and it is important for them to be quick-thinking and very open-minded. And they have to be prepared to work very hard. They've got to have an emotional and mental stability to be able to work in the way that I want."

About a dozen students will be chosen by audition to take the musical theatre course. "In most cases the course will be tailored to meet the needs of those people," says Hammond. "There will be a strong emphasis on physical fitness and stamina, not just in dance but in muscle training to assist the production of the voice." This could include Alexander Technique, Feldenkreis and many aspects of movement which improve freedom of vocal expression.

The informal objectives are seen as forming the heart of each five-week course block. For a chosen topic (eg, Cole Porter or the music of his era), each afternoon will be spent on related work to explore not only the music, speech and text, but also the literature and movement of the time. Team teaching is important to Hammond, as is the ability of the students to work with one another. "So often singing is taught in isolation, and then students are expected to communicate!"

The parameters of musical theatre are never easy to define, and Mary Hammond feels that there is no point in drawing boundaries. Opera counts as music theatre and so too does experimental work by young composers, the commercial work of Andrew Lloyd Webber, the comedies of Gershwin, Cole Porter and Rogers and Hammerstein, and the newest works by composers such as Steve Reich. Hammond is eager that the musical theatre course should put itself at the disposal of new writing. There is room for exchange between the different genres; for instance, Hammond explains that working in musical theatre can offer many benefits to opera singers, as the technical demands are within their capabilities and they are able to concentrate more on developing freedom of voice production and more relaxed physical expression.

Although the musical theatre will be a departure for the two colleges, Hammond emphasises that it will be developed very much as a part of the institution. Mark Wildman and Neil Mackie, heads of vocal studies for respectively the Academy and the College, will attend all the auditions, so there should be, says Hammond, "a consistency of standard throughout the joint vocal faculty as a whole".

The course has been welcomed by the musical theatre business. Individuals who have offered to advise have so far included luminaries such as Nicholas Hytner, John Caird, Victor Morris, Howard Harrison, Martin Kosh, Julia Mackenzie, Diana Rigg and David White (who is himself a graduate of the College). At the end of the course there will be a showcase performance to which agents, managers and producers will be invited, which may provide a welcome opening of doors for gifted students. and being in London, says Hammond, is a distinct advantage as it gives access to a huge range of people who will have an interest in the course. As always, the proof of the training will be in the performing.

Academy students in a workshop on American musicals where a patchwork quilt was a focal point

Jessica Duchen is a freelance writer who is currently researching a book about the composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold

Self-composure

A marginal, eccentric and coarse failure. Is this any way to describe Joanna MacGregor? Well, they were her words when she talked to Paul Fisher

A REASONABLE definition of a sane person is someone who knows what others are likely to think of them. It is this version of sanity which had the younger Joanna MacGregor avoiding piano competitions. "I don't think the great and the good who sit on those juries would have liked me very much," she says. "They would have thought I was marginal or eccentric."

At the beginning of her career they'd have been right. Back then she was a wannabe composer who mixed jazz with the classics and had had little formal piano teaching. Long term they'd have been wrong because Joanna MacGregor's career has since developed into mainstream eclectic. She's becoming one of the great and good, and has the name and the drive to organise music festivals and star in TV series. There have been soloist's slots with just about every British orchestra and she has recorded a string of discs for Collins Classics. The recordings range from Scarlatti to Ives and her concert schedule is equally varied. In March she was playing Messaien's Oiseaux Exotiques with the Rotterdam Philharmonic under Sian Edwards and Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand conducted by Vernon Handley. She's just done a Purcell Room recital of contemporary pieces by, amongst others, John Zorn and Frank Zappa, and then there are two April dates playing Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue with the Philharmonia at the Royal Festival Hall and in Nottingham.

The diversity is part of a scheme. Though she is best known as a vigorous interpreter of contemporary music, she's not going to be stuck in that groove, how ever wide. "If that's all you play, I'm sure it is bad for your technique. The skills you acquire playing subtle composers like Ravel are the same skills you should take to a piece of new music. It is always good to keep refreshing yourself by going back to composers like Ravel, Chopin and Scarlatti. When you cross over into contemporary music, there are so many difficult things that it asks you to do and sometimes you can find yourself getting coarse."

Her? Coarse? She likes these games of opposites and has another tease line for interviewers. "I'm a failure," she says.

Get away, you say.

"Yes, I'm a failed composer."

Some failure, for the magazine clippings reveal she's written TV, film and theatre scores for The Winter's Tale, Peer Gynt, Dr Faustus and Hamlet. "But I've lost the bottle to compose," she explains. "I became anguished, which was a shame, and I sublimated my longing to write by doing jazz transcriptions. It was a way of putting pen to paper."

There were compensations. "At the same time I abandoned serious composing, I discovered a day couldn't go by without me playing. I think that's the great indication of whether you can be an instrumentalist. Can you get by without playing an instrument? If you can, you haven't got it. What people don't realise is how hard you have to work. It's not a secret because you can discover in books that people like Horowitz and Arrau practised for ten hours a day." Her technique is to take a piece apart. "I use my metronome a lot and start at a pedantic plod."

Joanna MacGregor came to the Academy for a postgraduate piano course with Christopher Elton. "I loved being at the Academy," she says. "Just walking up and down that staircase gives you an Ivesian collage from all those different practice rooms."

You build up slowly?

"I'm afraid so."

(During one of her recent Strings Bows and Bellows TV programmes she asked Rolf Hind how he set about learning a fiendish piece by Ligeti. "You take one hand and learn it, then you learn the other," Hind tells her. "You put them together and then it falls apart.")

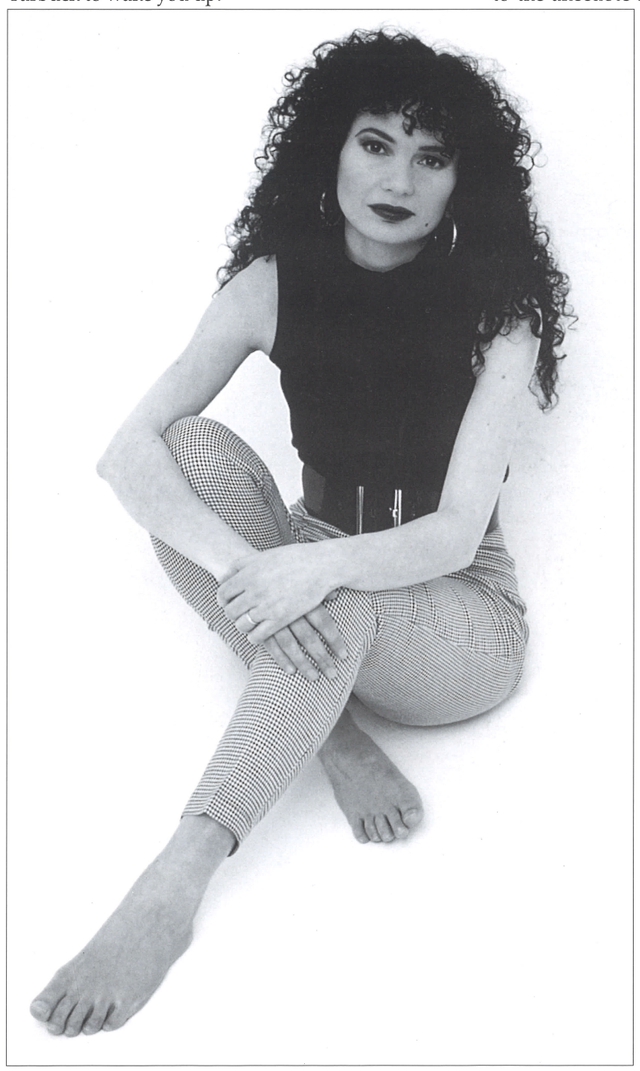
Joanna MacGregor is at her most straightforward talking about the piano and her clarity of thought here is more than matched by her musicianship. "I've never known anyone so totally passionate about playing the piano," says Christopher Elton, the Academy's keyboard department head. Somebody from The Times paid a more convoluted compliment, writing: "MacGregor is very much the performer but ... and this is rare in classical pianists ... the extrovert in her is fused with the intense listening of the more private player on whom one also often simply has to eavesdrop."

High praise for a marginal, eccentric and coarse failure. Complicated is a better word for her and the complexity is in defiance of slick classifications. Ask her a question and, Zen-like, she'll often give two answers. For example, how does the high priestess

"Pianists, unlike singers, don't play for each other. Singers always seem to have a teacher. The trouble with being a soloist is that it can be lonely. There's an enormous difference walking on your own to a platform to walking out with others. It's always an ordeal and things can get out of proportion." Joanna MacGregor keeps her sense of proportion with more social activities like television and radio appearances and organising the Almeida Festival.

of crossover define classical music? "It is bound up in class and posh audiences and reverence, although popularity is changing that." A solid enough reply which she undercuts immediately by pointing out that there's nothing new about the classics being popular for "Sir Thomas Beecham was more of a household name than any of the current conductors". So classical music is for the posh ... but it ain't necessarily so.

Class got another mention when she called the televised Tchaikovsky gala at Covent Garden an "upper class Royal Variety Show without Jimmy Tarbuck to wake you up."



What class does she belong to? Again there are two answers. "I have to say I was born into a working class family and then I went to Cambridge."

Her parents are Seventh Day Adventists who, as a religious-cum-socialist experiment, educated their daughter at home until she was 11. "It was weird and made me different from other children at a crucial stage," she says. On starting secondary school she "couldn't believe there was a teacher there, telling you what to write, telling you what to think, telling you everything." The predictable end to the anecdote is that school was oppressive, but not a bit of it. "I found school extraordinary," she recalls. "I thought it was very friendly."

She went to Cambridge University intending to become a composer and graduated wanting to be a pianist. The Academy beckoned, partly because her mother had studied there and partly because she'd already had some tuition from Christopher Elton. She remembers him "ruthlessly laying bare the techniques I didn't have" with killer pieces like Schumann's Papillon and putting her on a strict regime that paralleled what she would have done had she been an Academy undergraduate. "I wasn't one of those Yehudi Menuhin types who had known all along what they wanted to be. Christopher thought I was a talented but rather untutored pianist."

And this, to confirm the sanity theory of knowing yourself as others do, is precisely Christopher Elton's memory of her. She still keeps in touch with him and says that "Stephen Kovacevich has been a friend and mentor over the years". But there are no teachers now. "Pianists, unlike singers, don't play for each other. Singers always seem to have a teacher." This thought led, without pause, into another. "The trouble with being a soloist is that it can be lonely. There's an enormous difference walking on your own to a platform to walking out with others. It's always an ordeal and things can get out of proportion."

Though she is best known as an interpreter of contemporary music, she's not going to be stuck in that groove, however wide. "If that's all you play, I'm sure it is bad for your technique. The skills you acquire playing subtle composers like Ravel are the same skills you should take to a piece of new music. It is always good to keep refrefreshing yourself

PHOTO: COLLINS CLASSICS

On stage she's a figure of unsmiling flamboyance sat forward on the piano stool with her trademark big hair and big metal earrings. During performance intensity is all and she keeps her sense of proportion with more social activities like TV work and festival organising.

Notably, she revived the Almeida Festival and she has plans for a Liverpudlian festival, perhaps on Hilbre Island which is near her new house. "No," she says, "this sort of thing isn't a distraction. I think it healthy to go out and do my bit to promote other artists and music."

In Strings, Bows and Bellows, the recent BBC2 series of ten by ten minute chats and performances, she shows her collaborative talents to the full. MacGregor knows she's worth watching as well as worth listening to and this confidence enables her to bring out the best in other people. The double bass player Chi-Chi Nwanoku does a star turn playing Tom Johnson's Failing. She must play and talk at the same time and the text is a commentary on the impossibilist school of modern composing. "The task will become so difficult I won't be able to do it," Nwanoku says as the music accelerates. But the audience won't know and she's sawing away faster than a train and saying: "If I succeed in playing accurately I will fail to fail ... if I try to fail that will be a kind of success ... I will not be able to fail unless I try to succeed." Nwanoku's stressed-out face appears in a mirror and the image dissolves to a smile. The programme deserves to become a classic.

In her role as TV interrogator of James Macmillan, MacGregor asks him for a description of his sonata which she is about to play. Macmillan suggests bleakness and iciness and when she pushes him he gives the definitive answer. "To be more specific leads an audience too far. They should be allowed to invent their own pictures in their own minds. That's what music should do for them."

TV demands pictures as well as dialogue and some of the filming, such as the silently grinding machinery for a Schnittke piece or the piano carted out to the countryside to illustrate Toru Takemitsu's Uninterrupted Rests, lapses into pop video cliche. No matter; the music is strong, serious and will pull in a few converts ... even to John Cage. The series ends with a three-musician piano work by the jazz keyboardist Django Bates. Before the music starts he explains that Tentle Morments (it is a conflation of gentle moments, tender morsels and mental torment) is about the turmoil he's gone through in choosing whether to follow up his training as a classical musician or to play more instinctual music of his own. Rolf Hind completes the trio and, during the series' only section of improvisation, Bates contents himself with repeating a simple scale. You can see MacGregor grinning at this subversion of musical seriousness; it's not often that she can afford herself the luxury of a smile when she's playing.

THE JOANNA MACGREGOR RECORDINGS

BARBER/IVES
Barber: Sonata, Excursions
Ives: Sonata No. 1
Collins 11072

BRITTEN/SAXTON
Britten: Piano Concerto (original version), Paul Bunyan Overture
Saxton: Music to Celebrate the Resurrection of Christ
ECO/Steuart Bedford
Collins 11022

BRITTEN
Piano Concerto (revised version), Violin Concerto
ECO/Steuart Bedford/Lorraine McAslan (violin)
Collins 13012

GERSHWIN
An American in Paris, Rhapsody in Blue (jazz band version), Piano Concerto
LSO/Carl Davis
Collins 11392

SATIE
Solo works
Collins 10532

SCARLATTI
Sonatas
Collins 13222

WOOD
Piano concerto
Collins 20072

AMERICAN PIANO CLASSICS
Nancarrow, Ives, Garner, Copland, Monk, Gershwin
Collins 12992

The underestimated maestro

In the centenerary year of Hans von Bulow's death, Ian Hughes assesses the archetypal conductor's tempestuous career

MUNICH - APRIL 10th, 1865. An orchestra and singers are engaged in the first rehearsal of a brand new opera, written by Germany's most controversial composer. Before them stands one of the most respected conductors of his time. As both he and the music become more animated and passionate, we cut to an apartment less than a mile away. A woman screams out in the agony of childbirth. She is, in fact, the conductor's wife and after the baby is successfully delivered a man enters the room. He is small, yet distinguished and old enough to be her father. He is, however, the father of her child, the composer of the opera and mentor to the conductor.

This could so easily be the opening paragraph of a synopsis for a Hollywood mini-series, but in reality, these are the facts which surrounded one of the most painful events in the life of the pianist and conductor, Hans von Bulow. His wife, Cosima, who was the second child born of the stormy liaison between Franz Liszt and Marie d'Agoult, had, for nearly a year, been having an affair with the one man her husband deified above all others - Richard Wagner. Hans was not totally blind to the affair and although he had already fathered two daughters with Cosima, and desperately wanted this third child to be his also, he must have known in his heart of hearts that as he raised his baton for the first time on Tristan and Isolde, Cosima was about to give birth to the composer's child, and not his. The baby, another girl, was even named Isolde, but for the sake of propriety Bulow was registered as the father with Wagner as the godfather.

Hans von Bulow was an inspirational tyrant who sometimes reduced musicians to tears. He was the seminal conductor who, according to the assessment of Norman Lebrecht, was alternately servile and domineering, humble and haughty, sentimental and sadistic

There was an inevitability about this momentous episode which made the events of that day so much the more poignant. Ten years earlier, as Bulow wrote to Liszt to ask for his daughter's hand in marriage, he concluded: "I swear to you that, however much I feel bound to her by love, I should never hesitate to sacrifice myself to her happiness and release her, were she to realise that she had made mistake in regard to me."

Coupled with this pledge was his devotion to Wagner. Despite having already established an international reputation as a concert pianist and conductor, Bulow lived to serve him and described himself as "only Wagner's baton". He considered his own raison d'etre was to contribute to the realisation of Wagner's vision even if that meant the sacrifice of his marriage to ensure not only his wife's happiness but the emotional stability of his master.

Apart from the suppressed pain and humiliation he must have felt, their menage a trois was the subject of public scandal and sensationalist journalism comparable to any of today's tabloid campaigns. Wagner's ambitions were, at this time, being funded by the patronage of the young king of Bavaria, Ludwig II. Many of the king's advisers distrusted Wagner and considered that far too much of the state's money was being squandered on him. He had many enemies in the court and the press who were all too eager to see him fall from grace. Regrettably, Bulow became caught up in these petty jealousies, as the caricature from an 1864 Munich newspaper shows.

To save Ludwig any embarrassment and to ensure that his patronage of Wagner was not jeopardised Bulow maintained the pretence that he and Cosima were leading a happily married life for another three and a half years. Finally, on November 16 1868, Cosima left Hans for good and joined her beloved Richard at Tribschey, his house beside the Lake of Lucerne. From that time until Wagner's death in 1883, they were never separated for more than a few days.

But what of Hans von Bulow in his own right? His legacies to the world of music are immense, and yet there is no extant biography of the man. What we know of him is gleaned largely from the biographies of those with whom he was involved, such as Liszt, Cosima and Wagner. I'll wager the greatest number of consecutive pages ever written about him form the first chapter of Norman Lebrecht's excellent book, The Maestro Myth. As far as Lebrecht is concerned, Bulow was the archetypal maestro figure. "Alternately servile and domineering, humble and haughty, sentimental and sadistic, he personifies the dilemmas and dichotomies of future conductors. Their collective insecurity and much of their mystique are rooted in Bulow's contradictory, cantankerous character ..."

Many of these contradictory traits were the result of his brutal and austere upbringing which was far from unusual in the Germany of the day. Lebrecht goes so far as to say that these child-rearing methods "... are today acknowledged as having been the nursery for Nazism". Hans learnt to obey without question and in turn asserted himself over those he regarded as his inferiors. This duality was graphically illustrated during rehearsals for Die Meistersinger when Wagner would berate him loudly in front of the orchestra, and Bulow would then vent his spleen on the musicians in such a tyrannical manner as to reduce some of them to tears.

Bulow turned to music originally as a release from his domestic environment. His parents' political beliefs were poles apart and this eventually led to their divorce when he was 19. Tension consistently pervaded the household and regular furious outbursts were exceedingly common. These distressed Hans greatly and as a method of defence he would collapse in a dead faint in an attempt to diffuse the situation. These fainting fits and severe headaches were to dominate him throughout his life at the onset of any emotional crisis. So common were these headaches, that at the age of 63 he developed a brain tumour which remained undiagnosed and ultimately proved fatal. He died, whilst convalescing in Cairo, on February 12th 1894.

The weaknesses in his character and his inadequacies as a human being should not overshadow his achievements however. He premiered Tristan and Isolde and Die Meistersinger; he promoted the symphonies of Smetana, Dvorak and Stanford, and nurtured the talents of the juvenile Richard Strauss. Whilst in Russia, he met Tchaikovsky and literally retrieved his First Piano Concerto from the waste-bin after the Rubinstein brothers had pronounced it unplayable. So convinced by it, he performed it in Boston, screaming instructions to the orchestra and audience alike until he was satisfied by the reaction. In 1881 he was asked by the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen to transform his very average court orchestra into something special and was given unlimited resources to do so. It was not long before the orchestra acquired both a national and international reputation, and when the time came to appoint a helmsman to the newly formed Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Hans von Bulow was the first and only choice. Under the rule of Bismark, Berlin had become an austere city which was devoid of culture, and Bulow relished the challenge of educating its audiences and establishing Berlin as a cultural capital. On one occasion he performed Beethoven's Ninth Symphony twice in the same concert to convince Berlin of its importance. The orchestra went from strength to strength and became the city's calling card. This year, the centenary of Bulow's death, the orchestra will be performing its customary May Day Europa Concert in Meiningen as a mark of respect to its first principal conductor. As if his achievements in life were not enough, his death inspired Gustav Mahler, who had been a life-long admirer, to compose his Resurrection Symphony. Then, as now, his achievements were underestimated and yet the world of music would be so much the poorer had it not been for the life of Hans von Bulow.

A tabloid-style view, circa 1864, of Hans von Bulow tagging behind his wife Cosima and his hero Wagner. All three did their best to maintain the appearance of traditional family values until Cosima eventually left von Bulow and set up house with Wagner in 1868.

Ian Hughes is an ARAM. He divides his time between conducting, composing film scores and writing .

To teach or not to teach

Colin Metters (who is pictured right) on the mysteries of conducting

DISCUSSIONS as to the value of the person who waves his arms around in front of the orchestra and arguments over whether or not conducting can be taught, will run and run. Erich Leinsdorf's splendid book The Composers's Advocate (a must for any aspiring conductor) puts it like this: "One of the differences between evaluating performers who sing or play instruments and those who conduct is the inability of most lay people to understand what conductors are doing. Many music lovers can easily distinguish a first-rate tenor from an indifferent one, an outstanding pianist from a routine performer, or a truly fine string player from a scratchy practitioner. Yet these same listeners are at a loss to judge the capabilities of a conductor. The qualifications for this elusive art and craft are a mystery to all but a few experts."

Confusion arises from the variety of individual styles and idiosyncratic personalities which distract us from the essential principles which lie behind the relationship between conductor and orchestra. Hence the apparent discrepancy between such conductors as Sir Adrian Boult, Carlos Kleiber, Bernard Haitink and Sir Colin Davis, all of whom display totally different styles. What unites them is the strength and breadth of their musical vision and their ability to communicate to the orchestra their inner musical conviction, through the medium of gesture and physical representation, thus influencing the final performance.

The conductor must be first and foremost a musician - then also a communicator, catalyst and motivator, becoming the focal point for the realisation of the performance. As Bernstein said, "A conductor must not only make the orchestra play, he must make them want to play."

Conducting remains an intangible art much of which cannot be taught. There is, nevertheless, a considerable amount that does demand our serious study. Hermann Scherchen wrote, "The force of personality and artistic potency cannot be learnt or acquired; that much is nature's gift. But all professional training is of a technical order and the technique of conducting can be learnt as any other." In the words of the great violin pedagogue Ivan Galamian, "Technique is to have total control over the realisation and execution of a musical idea". On any instrument this requires a high order of self-discipline. Conducting technique is perhaps more elusive and ill-defined but requires no less self-awareness. The complication for conductors is that we produce not one note ourselves yet must influence and persuade the orchestra in the way it plays. Anyone with a basic musical instinct could make gestures to follow the general sound of a known symphony, creating the illusion that they are causing the performance rather than following it. Obviously this is not conducting, although gesture is of course important since it forms the basis for a great deal of what the conductor does. The danger is that gestures can be superficially adopted without understanding, rather than with knowledge of the musical and practical implications.

Technique does not simply mean clear and efficient beating. To be "clear" with the baton means little in itself. The use of the baton is part of a much bigger understanding. "Clarity" has to do with the ability to convey the essence of the music so that the musical intention is unambiguous and therefore of meaning for the orchestra.

How can this be achieved? In the first place there is a basic misconception (still taught) that conducting is about controlling the orchestra. This is false and not a little insulting. Conductors cannot control players (other than by contract or dismissal!). Our objective should be to *influence the playing*. This may seem a simplistic distinction - it isn't. This attitude of control is done to the players and is by definition an imposition, with results that are at best superficial. Influence of the playing, on the other hand, is done *with* the players and is based on fundamental principles of music-making, as opposed to directing traffic. The principle is straightforward, in practice rather more difficult.

In rehearsal all musicians deal with the basic musical elements - rhythm, tempo, pulse, balance, line, dynamics, articulation, phrasing, sonority etc. It is these specifics which the conductor must address, developing the ability to make them visual and perceivable by the orchestra so reflecting the overall musical argument and reinforcing those things prepared in rehearsal. By affecting and changing these fundamental musical elements through a language of controlled gesture (an aspect of technique but only the beginning) there can be real and tangible influence over the playing and therefore the performance as a whole.

Emphasis is quite rightly placed on the need for us to understand how we communicate with the orchestra, but the greater part of the conductor's time is spent in studying the repertoire and in the continuing process of becoming a better musician. (One lifetime is not enough.) Our approach to the score therefore is of great importance. Firstly, it should be understood that interpretation is not the search for something new. "What can I do with this piece to make it different so I can be recognised as a great interpreter?" This is not the way forward. "Never think what can I make of this piece," said Barbirolli, "but try to discover what the composer meant to say. I would say to any young musician who contemplates this most arduous and responsible of careers make your watchwords "Integrity and sincerity to yourself and loyalty to the man whose music you are seeking to interpret"."Although our own musical personalities and instincts must play a part it is important to keep Barbirolli's maxim clear to avoid the music becoming a vehicle for our own personal statement rather than that of the composer.

In the media, the cult of the maestro may well praise the conductor for a good performance and

blame the orchestra for a bad one. Orchestras perceive us differently. Apart from those who defy all the rules and seem to function simply on high-octane charisma and five-star factor X, it could be said that, to players, conductors come in a variety of guises - or perhaps disguises: with musical integrity, a strong musical personality and the ability to communicate those convictions to the orchestra; with all the necessary musical qualifications but little ability to communicate; with a workable, clear stick technique but no musical ideas; with very little musical understanding and no technique either.

Sometimes the true musician and conductor come together; which brings me to my teacher and mentor George Hurst. In my years of study with him he always maintained a distinction between those who seriously wanted to conduct and those who simply wanted to be conductors. Although not always understood it is an important distinction. To make an analogy - there are those who wish to be actors and those who wish to be film stars. You don't *have* to be able to act to be a film star - but there are many film stars who are *also* fine actors.

Apart from the obvious academic study - score reading, transpositions, historical background, performance practice, etc - the orchestra itself is worthy of our attention. It is a complex and highly sophisticated musical instrument and its make-up - sociological, psychological and emotional - has a strong corporate persona as well as containing a myriad of individual ideas. Hermann Scherchen once wrote that the conductor is playing upon a live instrument, that he must understand not only the laws of his art, but also the idiosyncrasies of this instrument: "He will find perforce that he has to form a higher and more spiritual conception of these laws in consequence."

If we then approach what George Hurst calls "the most comprehensive of responsibilities" with respect for the composer and for the players with whom we work, develop ourselves as musicians and understand as much of our craft as possible, we shall be more effective and constructive and less of a pain in the backside to our colleagues.

Ultimately it has to be a partnership, if occasionally a difficult one. Orchestras also have their contribution to make in this, particularly with young conductors who would dearly love to be able to go home, open an instrument case, take out the orchestra, tune it and then practise for five hours a day to perfect their technique. This is a perennial dilemma since even after much assiduous study a conductor cannot gain real experience without an orchestra, and orchestras (understandably) are not enthusiastic about conductors without experience. This means that learning to conduct can be a long and often difficult road. A little tolerance and help along the way is always appreciated.

Those who wish to avoid any serious study of the subject will continue to believe that conductors are born not made; assuming that the only qualification needed to be a famous conductor is to have been born. Certainly those fortunate enough to have talent are ahead of the game. Talent cannot be acquired through teaching and no amount of good teaching can compensate for the lack of it. Talent can, however, be developed and guided and that's where the RAM Conductors' course comes in.

Colin Metters is director of the Academy conducting course.

A heart of oak

As a taster to a major new biography, Arthur Jacobs writes of Sir Henry Wood's lifelong attachment to the Royal Academy of Music

THE YOUNG Henry J Wood, later to be celebrated as conductor of the Proms for fifty seasons, of course attended the Royal Academy of Music as a student. Where else? The Academy's location was then in Tenterden Street, off Hanover Square, only a few minutes' walk from his home in Oxford Street. There his father, also named Henry J Wood, had his shop as an optician and model-engineering maker - and, like many Victorian tradesmen, lived on the same premises as served his business.

Born on 3 March 1869, Wood picked up (rather than studied) the technique of the piano, violin and viola from his music-loving home. Wood senior was a keen amateur cellist and tenor, who sang in the St Sepulchre's choir in Holborn. The boy took organ lessons there, which he afterwards described as "farcical". In an unusual step, his father then sent him to learn music theory with one of the great Victorian musical pedagogues, Ebenezer Prout (1835-1909), who in addition to his professorship at the Academy gave private lessons at home in Dalston, assisted by his son Louis. To "these two great teachers" Wood credited his grounding in harmony, counterpoint, form and instrumentation.

Tuition at the Academy was offered not by the year but by the term: during 1886 to 1888 he stayed for six terms. He was placed under one of the leading organ professors, Charles Steggall, and studied piano principally with Walter Macfarren. Joining Prout's class in composition, he found among his fellow-students Edward German, seven years his senior. At an Academy concert at St James's Hall in July 1887, German's Symphony in E Minor had its first hearing, and Wood won favourable notice as soloist in the first movement of an organ concerto by Prout. Soon Wood appeared at an Academy concert as a composer: the magazine Era complimented him on "two really charming songs", with words translated from Heine as The Sea Hath its Pearls and When on my Couch I'm Lying.

As a student accompanist for several of the Academy's teachers of singing, Wood particularly remembered Manuel Garcia (1805-1906), perhaps the most famous vocal teacher of his time and the inventor of the laryngoscope. Even in his eighties, Garcia was a man of immense vigour. On one occasion when Wood allowed the tempo to slacken, Garcia "cannoned me to the floor, taking the keys from under my fingers. The singer went on, and any onlooker might have thought it part of the game, so naturally was it done."

That anecdote comes from Wood's autobiography, My Life of Music, published in 1938. Unfortunately many of its dates are wrong, and some incidents are distorted or simply fabricated. What are we to make of his account of leaving the Academy? Sir Alexander Mackenzie (the newly appointed Principal) was conducting a Handel organ concerto at a rehearsal with Wood as soloist, but handed over the conducting to a student who failed to maintain the ensemble. Furious, Wood rose from the organ bench and (he tells us) walked out at once and for ever, leaving his hat and coat behind him. It would have been a needless way to have lost a hat and coat when one's home was only round the corner - and in fact the statement is nonsense. Wood performed at an Academy concert later in that term (summer 1888). He had no need to return for a further term, since he had already laid the career foundations, principally as organist but already with publications as a composer.

He had not studied conducting at the Academy. No such instruction was offered. Conducting came to him, as to many organists, as a kind of outgrowth in leading local amateurs. His professional aptitude for the baton became clear when he secured touring

Arthur Jacobs standing next to the bust of Sir Henry Wood. During the Proms, the Academy loans the statue to the Albert Hall .
PHOTO: RITA CASTLE

posts with the Arthur Rousbey Opera and later the more distinguished Carl Rosa company. Then in 1892 he made a London reputation in conducting the first British performance of Tchaikovsky's opera Yevgeny Onegin. In 1893 the Queen's Hall opened and in 1895 its manager, Robert Newman, chose the 26-year-old Wood to conduct the first season of Proms. The rest is history. The end came in August 1944: Wood died after taking part in the "substitute Prom" programmes which the BBC Symphony Orchestra broadcast from Bedford, its refuge from bomb-imperilled London.

To the great advantage of the modern biographer, much documentation of Wood's work is preserved at the Academy, including a scrapbook dating right back to the organ recitals he gave in boyhood. Against a notice of a local choral concert held in Clapton (east London) on 12 December 1887, he himself later scrawled in heavy pencil and with characteristically erratic spelling: "This creats [sic] my 50th as a paid conductor". By retrospectively claiming that he was not paid until the following month, he was able to pick 1938 as his jubilee year.

The Academy conferred a fellowship on him in 1920 (preceding five honorary doctorates from Manchester, Oxford, Birmingham, Cambridge and London universities) but his association went much beyond that formality. In 1923 he accepted the conductorship of the Academy's senior orchestra. That a conductor of such eminence should commit himself to twice-weekly rehearsals of a student body was, and is, unparalleled. Thoroughness was his motto. It was reported that he kept the students for a whole term on the overture to Oberon, interchanging every individual part among the strings and among the wind sections.

Sir Henry did not study conducting at the Academy. No such instruction was offered. Conducting came to him, as to many other organists, as a kind of outgrowth in leading local amateurs

For Mary Stratford (at that time Mary Fouracre), a cello student of the Academy from 1924, those two orchestral rehearsals were the highlights of the week, along with chamber music under Lionel Tertis. As for Wood, "We all loved him - he could do no wrong for us". Once, full of nerves, she could hardly get herself to the platform as one of two solo cellos in a Handel concerto. But as soon as she and her partner were seated, and looked up at Sir Henry, "he gave a prodigious wink, and that was it! Suddenly the nerves fell off like a discarded mantle. You wanted to play as well as you could because he was looking after you".

In 1926 Wood brought the Academy's orchestra, choir and solo singers to give Bach's St Matthew Passion at Queen's Hall - apparently the first time that it had ever been given in London without cuts. "We hope that it will not remain unique," commented the Musical Times. This was indeed the model for later uncut performances by such bodies as the Bach Choir. It is often forgotten that Wood was a celebrated choral conductor, his performances of Bach and Handel (and Wagner, in concert versions) being high points of the festivals which he directed at Birmingham, Sheffield and Norwich.

"Timber", as Wood was affectionately known by his players, was a master of discipline, timing his rehearsals to the minute. A stickler for intonation, he designed a tuning machine. It had turning handles and bellows which sounded two notes - A=440 for the strings and a little below that for wind instruments, allowing for the rise in pitch which would result in a normally heated, normally full hall. This machine is now among the Academy's legacy of Henry J Wood's possessions. His paintings (he was a keen and talented amateur) adorn the Henry Wood Room, the main public waiting room.

Also at the Academy is a remarkable set of Wood's original gramophone recordings. A collection of much larger bulk is Henry J Wood's complete music library, including 2,800 orchestral scores and 1928 sets of complete orchestral parts, which he donated to the Academy in December 1938. The donation was not only a gesture of munificence; it also solved the problem of how he himself could continue maintaining it. He expected the Academy to continue servicing him when he required its music for performance in any location, and among the historic correspondence of the Academy with Wood are many letters barely concealing temper on both sides when, in the ensuing war, his demands were not always consistently met.

Twice the musical world joined to honour Henry J Wood. On 5 October 1938 a multiple-orchestra concert in the Albert Hall saluted his fifty years of conducting. His friend Rachmaninoff journeyed specially to play his Piano Concerto No 3. Vaughan Williams, another old friend and a devoted admirer, wrote Serenade to Music for the occasion and it had sixteen singers delivering the lines from Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice. The concert was in aid of Wood's favourite charitable cause, the endowment of hospital beds for orchestral musicians. Ironically, the post-War National Health Service nullified such endowments; and, just as ironically, his later fund for rebuilding Queen's Hall (destroyed by bombing in 1941) has come to nothing.

In 1944 his 75th birthday was marked by a royal award creating him a Companion of Honour (many thought it should have been the Order of Merit), as well as by another multiple-orchestra concert and by many presentations. On 3 March the Academy held a ceremony organised by the Performing Right Society. Sir Adrian Boult and Vaughan Williams were on the platform as Wood received an album in which hundreds had signed their names, many of them (including Bartok) with appropriate musical quotations. Most ingeniously, Elisabeth Lutyens wrote out a tiny Fanfare playable also al rovescio with, over the first bar, the direction: For Wood, the specified instruments being woodwind instead of the customary brass. It has proabably never been performed: who, on this 50th anniversary of his death, will remedy that?

Arthur Jacobs was a professor at the Academy from 1964 to 1979. His biography, Henry J Wood: Maker of the Proms, will be published by Methuen in July.

Breakfast in Senegal ...

Volker Stenzl tells of an adventurous African concert tour ...which ended

WE ALL know the feeling before a trip to a foreign continent where we have never been before - a mixture of curiosity, ticklish anxiety and high spirit of adventure. What is the climate like? The hotels? The people? The food? Are the countries politically and socially safe? All these things crossed our minds when Hans-Peter and I were invited to tour seven West African countries: Senegal, Zaire, Cameroon, Nigeria, Togo, Ghana and Ivory Coast (one week before our tour started the Zaire trip had to be cancelled because of civil war.)

The preparations took months, as they always do for musical tours, including all the necessary vaccinations, but finally everything was ready, and we took the train from our home to Frankfurt Airport. We travelled with three suitcases: two big

Our first morning in Africa was spent shopping. Black shoes and white shirts didn't cause any problems, and we decided, because of the sultry heat, to dispense with jackets.

ones with our personal belongings and a smaller one with all our concert clothes - black suits, black shoes, a lot of white shirts, black socks, black bow ties and cufflinks. The train was packed, so we had to leave our luggage in the aisle, and when we arrived at the airport we discovered that the smaller suitcase was missing, stolen at one of the previous stops. We had been told that theft in Africa was quite possible, but now it had happened in Germany before our trip had started. Having arrived at the airport at the last minute, we had no time to buy new things, we could only quickly tell the police our misfortune. The only advantage was that when we arrived in Dakar we had to carry one suitcase less.

So our first morning in Africa was spent shopping. Black shoes and white shirts didn't cause any problems, and we decided, because of the sultry heat, to dispense with jackets. The first black bow ties we found - after an hour's search - were plastic. Eventually we unearthed some real silk bow ties (which we still use and which always remind us of our "stolen suitcase"). At the beginning of each recital I told the audience this whole story, to explain why we played without jackets. It went down well, and the barrier between performer and audience was broken immediately.

Our second stop was in Yaounde, Cameroon. It was the only country where we had some free time to look around. We met a Cameroon girl who took us to her family home, one of those simple loamy huts with no running water. The people were extremely nice and shared everything they had (or didn't have) with us. We went to an "insider" market where the poorer Africans go shopping, although we didn't dare to eat some of the more exotic specialities, like live caterpillars - at least not at the beginning of our tour.

In the rain forest we were disappointed to see only one light green snake, about six feet long, but the flora were fascinating. We rowed up a river in a dugout (which was not completely watertight, so from time to time we had to empty it) under big, overhanging mammut trees. The mosquitos gave us a hard time, and without medical precautions you can easily catch malaria. I was eating a freshly caught grilled fish, when a big fish bone got stuck in my throat. This happened on a Friday night, Saturday it got worse, Sunday my vocal chords were so inflamed that I couldn't speak any more, and Monday it hurt so much that I had to go to a clinic. When the specialist arrived he took some rusty old instruments out of a cupboard but couldn't find any disinfectant. I was greatly relieved when he looked into my throat and said that the fish bone had disappeared.

Flying from one African country to the other can be adventurous. You can't rely on the schedule, the planes take off (usually over-booked and people have to fight for their seats) or they don't (the plane is short of fuel), but no one really knows what is going to happen. The general corruption (especially in Nigeria) means you have to pay a backhander for everything (passport control, customs...) to avoid trouble.

Lagos, Nigeria is one of the most corrupt and dangerous cities I have ever seen. We were advised

When you watch Africans walking in the streets, you notice their natural feeling for the rhythm of their bodies. Unfortunately, the masterclass piano students played as stiffly as a stick.

not to leave our hotel because the streets were unsafe. This hardly mattered because our hotel, like all those we stayed in, was almost empty, which was eerie. In fact, a week before we arrived in Louie, Togo, the President had fortified himself in the hotel as rebels stormed the place, though he managed to escape. When we arrived we were the only guests on any of the 23 floors of the hotel. We had an immense breakfast buffet just for ourselves, served by five waiters.

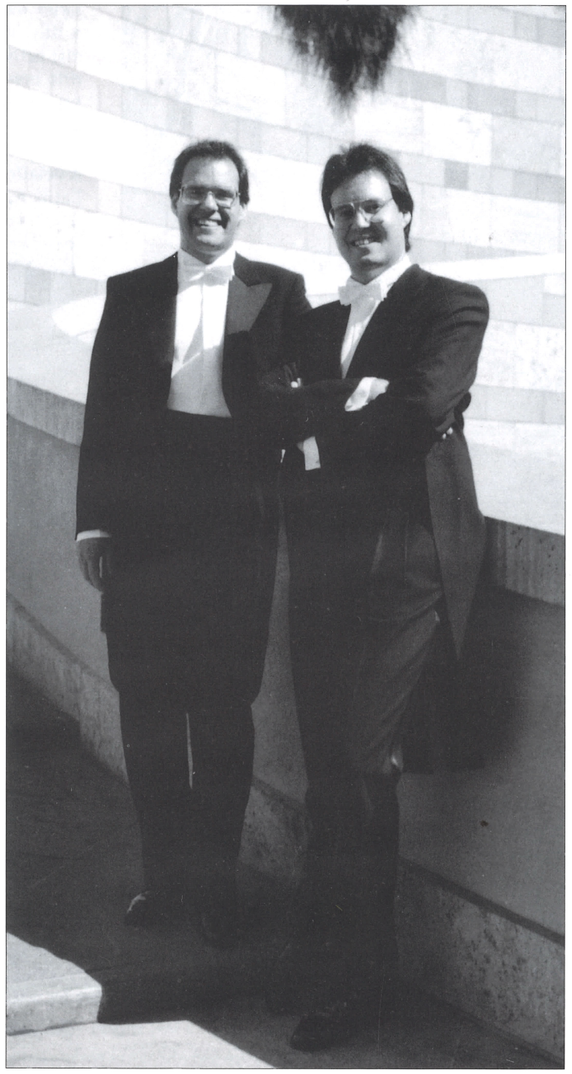
We played at least two recitals and gave a masterclass in every country. Although there are

... baggage in Frankfurt

almost before the plane took off from the airport in Germany

music colleges with proper students, the standard of tuition is poor, and our masterclasses were rather disappointing. When you watch Africans walking in the streets, carrying heavy items on their heads without losing balance, you notice their natural feeling for the rhythm of their bodies. Unfortunately this gets completely lost at the piano; the students played as stiffly as a stick. It was very difficult to make them relax (Hans-Peter found the best way: he laid a book on the player's head).

Our recitals, on the other hand, gave us great pleasure. All the pianos were reasonable Steinway concert grands (although the heat and humidity present serious problems and good technicians are thin on the ground). The performances were all sold out and 50-70 per cent of the audiences were Africans, listening to Mozart, Schubert and Brahms. Occasionally we could feel that they were not used to Western classical music, but they always showed great interest and especially appreciated the introductions we gave to each work we played. We have played in many countries, but this was an unusual trip, to say the least - and there's a suitcase somewhere in Germany which we really must find.



Hans-Peter and Volker Stenzl wearing the DJs which they did without during their tour of Africa. The lack of formality kept them cool and helped to break the barrier between performer and audience.

Volker and Hans-Peter Stenzl left the Academy in 1990 and are now an international prize-winning piano duo

Edmundo Ros:

After going to hear Edmundo Ros in

EDMUNDO ROS is the godfather of rock and roll. He came to the Royal Academy from Venezuela and whilst still a student he self-consciously grafted popular English melodies onto the Latin American rhythms which had originated in Africa. In lifting a black beat for a white audience he was two decades ahead of Elvis and all that followed.

He made his first broadcast on 8 August 1940 and continued as a band leader and nightclub owner until he retired on 8 August 1975. "And a very good, good evening to you. This is Edmundo Ros ... " was his catch phrase when he became a radio and TV star in the 1950s. He really didn't need to say his name for the voice and the music were distinctive enough. He sold millions of records and this original pop star is still going strong. Last January he stepped out of retirement and played to a packed house at the Queen Elizabeth Hall.

It was a fine concert and also something of a revelation for I went along thinking his brand of Latin American music was superannuated kitsch which seeps unwelcome into hotel lobbies. Played

The best of pop is always a little tongue in cheek, as if amazed at its power to impress. Luck is the word Edmundo Ros uses to describe his success and he is perhaps lucky in a musical background that straddled two continents and many more styles

loud and played live, the BBC Big Band revealed it as exuberant good time music and Edmundo Ros as a purveyor of upbeat happiness. The compelling beat, complex rhythms and easy melodies had every foot tapping and the audience of sixty, seventy and eighty-somethings sighed with pleasure as each tune emerged. "Ahhhh." The couple in row J must have fallen in love to Yellow Bird. "Ooooh. Isn't that Colonel Bogey? Do you remember when ...?"

Waves of affection swept toward the 84-year-old singer who'd entered leaning on a walking stick and who, by his final bow, was jumping for the joy of being on stage again. He'd proved there is no absurdity in an octogenarian singing love songs and that pop isn't mere ephemera. The orchestra was having a ball, the man on maracas didn't stop grinning all night and the whole house (including this forty-something) was rocking

The young Edmundo Ros in Latin American mode

the first ever rock and roller

performance and then meeting him, Paul Fisher came away with a theory

He gives a good interview as well. A large and powerful and twinkling man, he's got the kind of old-world courtliness that has him refusing to put the cream in your coffee in case he pours "too much for your taste". He carries his big stage presence into semi-private and disarms with frankness. "You must realise I like talking about me. It's my favourite subject. I like talking about food, music, sex and me. Ha!"

We'd started with music. "One of the biggest subjects in life and part of our being. You don't have to study music to appreciate it, though you must study to develop your knowledge of how to make it." I asked what he'd learnt at the Royal Academy. "Plenty, dear boy. Most of all I came away with a genuine respect for music in general and, in particular, I learned to distinguish between one arranger and another. The difference is in the quality of thought."

He joined the Royal Academy wanting to be a classical conductor. "Had I graduated as a conductor and did not make a succes of it, well ..." The thought of an unsuccessful career obviously appalled him and he got back to his usual line of gentle self-deprecation. "I played about at the piano, I tried clarinet and basic percussion and I did the easiest instrument of all: the saxophone." He also did the dance halls. "I discovered that in England most people dance to the melody. When I realised this, I thought if I use the old brain, I could be on to a good thing. So I transcribed a lot of recognised melodies into Latin American rhythms. But when I started I thought it was a joke."

The best of pop is always a little tongue in cheek, as if amazed at its power to impress. "Luck" is the word Ros often uses to describe his success and, all his entrepreneurial abilities to one side, he was perhaps lucky in a musical background that straddled two continents and many more styles. He was born in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad on 7 December 1910, moved to Caracas and "arrived in this delightful country on Wednesday 4 June 1937". By then he was steeped in military band music from his military service, in European classics through stints as a percussionist with a Venezuelan symphony orchestra and, most crucially, he'd absorbed the

"You are either born with the pulse or not. Some people can't walk from here to there with rhythm."

music of carnival. His precision about key dates in his life is matched by his precise enumeration of the influences behind Latin American music.

"One: people from Europe like the Italians who brought all their melodies to Argentina. Two: the Indians who sang in chorus with such beautiful harmonies. And three: the slaves who came over from Africa and gave us the beat." In short, a description of world music before anyone thought of the phrase.

Parlophone recorded Ros's first songs, sung in Spanish, in 1940. Edmundo Ros and his Rhumba Band became the Daily Express choice of the month and he started to hit the big time. After less than three years at the Academy his emerging success meant he could afford to "postpone" his studies. The big times got bigger and he never graduated. "Because of the war conditions, one couldn't always go to school, dear boy," he explained and then did a 700-watt twinkle. "And often one had overslept."

One of the Academy's most enterprising dropouts was made a fellow in 1991. But way back,

There are three main influences on Latin American music. One: the Europeans who brought all their melodies over to South America. Two: the Indians who sang in chorus with such beautiful harmonies. Three: the slaves who came over from Africa and brought the beat.

when his teachers might have preferred his presence in class, he was busy drilling fellow students into the Latin American beat. "All they knew was 4/4 time and I insisted on alla breve. I insisted on them reading 2/4 which was a strange tempo for them. You had to read a score to play in my orchestras but the music is more to do with pulsating than reading. You're either born with the pulse or not. Some people cannot even walk from here to there with rhythm." Here's the essence of pop and his appreciation of those with the beat came out in his praise for the BBC Big Band drummer. "Ha! My orchestra used to be known as the graveyard of drummers. It was the drummer who always messed things up. Unless he could do and feel what you told him, it was a waste of time."

His big band sound began in a small way with five musicians. Every time he got a pay rise he added personnel until he'd got four trumpets, five saxes doubling clarinets and flutes plus a rhythm section of piano, bass guitar and three percussionists. And he was always there out front

Edmundo Ros can lay a large claim to being one of the founders of modern popular music. In his youth he discovered that most people in England danced to the melody. Armed with this insight he transcribed the melodies of his adopted homeland and set them to a Latin beat. PHOTO: DECCA RECORDS

singing. "Not singing, dear boy. Croaking." Not true. His light baritone is tailor-made for a throwaway style which makes his singing sound as easy as speaking.

One of his more syrupy songs is called London is the Place For Me. At the QEH he slipped in a line about the big house he used to own in Mill Hill and, mid-song, the audience applauded. A master of stage craft had everybody with him in mutual celebration of their own successes after long lives. Nonetheless it seemed fair to ask why this born again Englishman has retired to Southern Spain. "Ha! To tell you the truth, I can't afford to live in London. When I lived here as Edmundo Ros I got carried away in the gulf stream of earning this and that. Now I'm not, I would hate to lose face."

That sort of directness is echoed in the direct appeal of music which still packs them in. Though he has no plans for another gig, I'll be there if he does one and meanwhile, thank you to Janet Snowman for introducing me to such a good thing. Do you really want me to return your cassettes?

In tune with the Zeitgeist

John Webb f inds himself in two minds about the work of Alfred Schnittke

THE RUSSIAN composer Alfred Schnittke is one of the most successful composers alive. His music has been championed by the cream of Russian musical talent: Mstislav Rostropovich, Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, Yuri Bashmet and Gideon Kremer, to name but a few. He has received commissions from orchestras throughout the world and been rewarded with many prizes, most recently the 1992 Praemium Imperiale award. Many festivals have been dedicated to his music, including the Royal Academy of Music's Festival (in March), which Schnittke himself attended. His most important achievement, however, is to have breached the contemporary music enclosure and to have found a genuinely appreciative audience.

Alfred Schnittke

An integral component of Schnittke's musical world, is his fascination with stylistic reference. Pastiches of baroque and classical composers, early Russian religious music, Mahlerian funeral marches, waltzes, tangos as well as quotations from Beethoven, Shostakovich, Mozart and many others are all to be found in his extensive output.

These borrowings are so pervasive that it is impossible to separate them from the real Schnittke. Indeed, it would be pointless trying: polystylism is fundamental to both the music's argument and its emotional power. Although familiar objects can provide the listener with useful landmarks, it would be wrong to think that Schnittke includes them for this reason alone and that he is nothing more than a mere compiler of pleasant medleys. Listening to his music can often be an uncomfortable experience; it is highly dissonant, regularly exploiting tone clusters and microtones, and can reach the most violent climaxes. Schnittke's powerful musical personality forges the diverse basic materials of each piece into an organic unity, which, at its best, can communicate with enormous intensity.

Perhaps the main reason Schnittke has become so successful is that his music chimes with the Zeitgeist. We live in a world which prizes the creations of the past above those of the present. We play music from the past, look in galleries full of great paintings, restore ancient buildings and vociferously protect outmoded traditions. Why? Surely any attempt to recreate the past results in failure? This nostalgia is almost certainly due to a lack of confidence in the future - a lack of faith, even, during our secular age.

Schnittke voices these feelings: his music is imbued with a sense of loss for perhaps better times which cannot be regained. It reflects a vein of deep pessimism and disillusion with our present situation and our prospects for the future. The stylistic allusions are integral to this feeling. They are attempts to recapture the past, but are never successful, leading only to anger and frustration.

Schnittke wears his heart on his sleeve and deeply believes in the importance of his message. Like anyone who is prepared to take a stand, controversy has come in the wake of acclaim: the music has its detractors. They claim that the music is a mechanically contrived sensationalism. And they have a point. Schnittke's works generally follow the same basic pattern. They begin with a quiet prelude which enigmatically exposes the work's basic material. One or two central movements follow in which the basic material goes through a series of episodic developments culminating in an enormous dissonant climax. The epilogue creates a cyclic form, recapitulating the basic ideas and then fading away.

Admittedly, simple techniques do not in themselves lead to bad music. However, when one examines a score by Schnittke, it is sometimes too easy to feel that he has `composed by numbers', taken a quotation or pastiche and used it in exactly the same way as he has done with a different quotation in a previous work. Instead of composing each new work afresh, solving each of its problems in the context of that individual work, he is abdicating his compositional responsibility, using a series of formulaic devices which, over several pieces, begin to sound tired and old. Even if Schnittke sincerely believes he has an important message to tell us, its importance is clearly reduced by his apparent recycling of techniques and ideas. If he really cares about his message, why does he not labour to make each work truly individual? The lack of care in the compositional process declares that the message is also not important. It becomes commonplace and banal, as if Schnittke is not really composing at all, but merely going through the motions.

I am in two minds about Schnittke's music. There are some works which I find extremely moving emotionally and incredibly impressive technically, such as the Piano Quintet, First Concerto Grosso, Third Quartet and Viola Concert. Other works I find banal to the point of physical discomfort and were it not for Schnittke's unique stylistic features, I could hardly credit that both types come from the same composer.

This said, his music raises questions, concerning the nature of contemporary music and its place in society, which need to be tackled. Whatever posterity's verdict on his music, the late twentieth century would be a much less interesting place without it.

John Webb is a postgraduate composer at the Academy. He was programme note writer for the Academy's Schnittke Festival. His new work, Barcarole, for large orchestra, was performed during the Festival, sandwiched between Schnittke's First and Fifth Symphonies.

A brief life

Rhian Davies on the short and brilliant career of Morfydd Owen

ARNOLD Bax, Benjamin Dale and York Bowen were amongst many distinguished turn-of-the-century British composers who studied with Frederick Corder at the Academy. But his favourite pupil was the little-known Welsh musician, Morfydd Owen. "A remarkable girl-student," wrote Corder in his Scrapbook, lately rediscovered at the Academy's Library: "She is a petite yet striking figure of decidedly Spanish rather than Welsh appearance, with an almost overpowering energy allied to extreme feminine beauty and charm. Her abilities were great and various; her general education of a very high order, her knowledge wide and accurate, her musicianship quite unusual for one of her sex. Not only a good pianist and a singer of unique style, her powers in composition (to which she chiefly devoted herself) were proved by the production of some sixty songs of quite remarkable originality."

This pen-portrait tells much of Morfydd's story, but by no means all. Born in Treforest, near Pontypridd, Glamorgan, she was considered a child prodigy, going to the piano at the age of four, and composing at six, before reading for her BMus at University College, Cardiff. Morfydd proceeded to the Academy in September 1912, and swept the board that first year by taking the Oliveria Prescott Prize for general excellence; the Swansea Eisteddfod Prize for singing; the Goring Thomas Scholarship for dramatic composition; and the Lucas Silver Medal for her orchestral Nocturne. This atmospheric work led a succession of Morfydd's compositions premiered during end-of-term concert at Queen's Hall: A Cycle of Sea Songs (1913), the tone-poem Morfa Rhuddlan (1914), scena, Toward the Unknown Region and cantata, Pro Patria (1915). These flagship scores head an output comprising over 200 extant works in their turn: choral, chamber and piano pieces, songs, hymns and folk transcriptions and arrangements.

Morfydd's vocal music reveals her creative gift at its most exquisite, as Corder rightly suggests, and includes two pairs of songs, In Cradle Land and The Fairies' Wedding (1916) and An Irish Lullabye and Pitter Patter (1917), which she herself introduced, to rave reviews, with the Academy orchestra conducted by Sir Alexander Mackenzie. Her versatility impressed the Academy's Principal as much as its Curator. "You see that little monkey?" Mackenzie was once overheard to remark, "There's nothing that little devil can't do." Morfydd was popular with her contemporaries, too. Harriet Cohen's autobiography recalls "the gifted and attractive Welsh composer, Morfydd Owen"; while Sir John Barbirolli also reflected: "I have rather a weakness for the Welsh - perhaps it is a legacy of my early days when I was surrounded by people with names like Parry Jones and Morfydd Owen."

Morfydd Owen

Gradually, press coverage of Morfydd's performances, including a highly successful professional debut at the Aeolian Hall, brought her to wider public attention. She received regular invitations to sing at society soirees frequented by the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, and other Liberal MPs. She also captivated an altogether more Bohemian crowd: DH Lawrence, Ezra Pound and Prince Feliks Feliksovich Yusupov, Rasputin's assassin. A six-month relationship with a second Russian, Alexis Chodak, persuaded Morfydd to apply for a University of Wales Fellowship to study in St Petersburg. The war prevented her travelling, however; the romance also foundered; and she married instead, on a whim, the pioneer of Freudian psychoanalysis in Britain, Ernest Jones.

Morfydd remained on the Academy's books until July 1917, and was awarded her ARAM a year later. But engagements and productivity dwindled dramatically during her chequered marriage. It is striking how her student record lists dancing classes, not singing lessons as before. Morfydd's death following an appendectomy, three weeks short of her twenty-seventh birthday, was equally abrupt. Corder collaborated with Jones to issue a four-volume Memorial Edition of her music (1923); but not until the release of this remembrance did we realise his depth of grief at Morfydd's premature passing. "Just when she had arrived at the plenitude of her powers," he concludes. "death snatched her away with cruel suddenness from a world that was only just beginning to know her." Posterity has been kinder than Corder anticipated. Republication and revivals of her vocal and orchestral compositions continue to confirm Morfydd Owen as the pivotal figure in early twentieth-century Welsh music.

Rhian Davies is author of Never So Pure A Sight: Morfydd Owen (1891-1918): A Life in Pictures. It will be published soon by Gomer Press.

"God loveth a cheerful giver"

So said St Paul, and in this article Claire Baker describes THORN EMI's slightly less exalted strategies for its corporate generosity

AT THORN EMI, we believe that as well as maximising shareholder value it is important to be a responsible corporate citizen. Thus we are committed to encouraging talent, enterprise, knowledge and opportunities for individuals in the societies which surround us.

The only way to deal fairly with all the proposals we receive was to develop a Charitable Giving and Sponsorship Policy. The current version relates to those community activities supported from the Group's Corporate Headquarters in the UK, but it does offer guidelines and examples to all our businesses around the world. With the geographical spread and diversity of THORN EMI's operations, it is not appropriate that community support should be entirely controlled from the Group's corporate centre so we encourage our businesses to develop local budgets and policies.

We consider a number of criteria when we are making decisions regarding donations and other support: First, we are concerned to have a well focused and balanced programme which adequately reflects the current needs of society and the communities around us. At present, we are targeting projects featuring the wider role which music can play in the community. Education, health and social welfare and the environment also feature strongly in our programme.

Second, an organisation seeking our support must be well run and preferably publish an annual account of its expenditure and progress. If it is a charity, it must be registered with the Charities Commission. We look for well-defined projects and events for which we can receive appropriate recognition, rather than contributing to operating costs, though this may vary according to the activity. Where possible we will make a commitment over a period of time, believing that this kind of partnership is of maximum benefit to the organisation as well as to THORN EMI.

A number of our projects have an international dimension, reflecting the global nature of the group. Examples include overseas training, events which will tour internationally or which have an international theme, programmes which increase understanding of global business and projects which help people from different ethnic and national backgrounds. One of the initiatives we funded in 1993 was an international exchange programme with Live Music Now which enabled six young musicians from Britain to perform in Holland, Spain and Belgium and musicians to come over and perform in the UK.

We also encourage and support the commitment, enthusiasm and participation of the about 200 THORN EMI corporate employees, many of whom are involved in voluntary activities within their local communities in the UK. There are three ways in which we help corporate employees to help the community - by matching financial donations pound for pound up to a level of £3,000 per year per employee, by matching their donations made through the Charities Aid Foundation Give As You Earn scheme, and through the THORN EMI Employee Volunteering Awards whereby an employee's time commitment to a charitable organisation can be recognised by an award of up to £250 paid directly to the charity. Finally, our financial donations must be tax efficient and therefore of maximum benefit to the recipient and of maximum value for THORN EMI, another reason why we use the Charities Aid Foundation.

Last year, we received around 3,000 requests for funding and support - a record number. Although we were able to respond positively only to a few hundred, we selected the projects which we felt would be the most effective in achieving their aims - whether to provide young children in inner cities with the opportunity to make music together - such as Hillhead Strings, Hackney Youth Orchestra and the Lewisham Academy - or to help relieve hunger and revive hope through world aid organisations, such as Action Aid, the Red Cross and Save The Children.

There are four charities to which the Department gives significant support, with practical help as well as major financial donations - Save The Children, The Home Farm Trust, CLIC (Cancer and Leukaemia in Childhood) and Blind in Business. Often we will sit down with them and bring our experience in running events and generating publicity to bear on a specific fund-raising project. We have run a number of events to raise money for each over the years which, in the case of Save The Children, has amounted to over £500,000 since 1989.

Our business profile in music connects us with many community initiatives and has brought us to assist the Academy. Underwriting the Recording Studio is the first such collaboration we have made with any conservatoire. It complements our charitable and educational activities involving music, such as The Partnership Trust awards to encourage excellence in music teaching, or the Masterclasses and recitals at the Foundation for Young Musicians at Morley College in South London. We are delighted to think that, with our help, Academy students can now record their material during their course work on state-of-the-art technology, prepare tapes and CDs for auditions and gain experience of an environment in which they will find themselves at some stage in their careers. Over the years many of the Academy's former students have gone on to become EMI artists (and employees), so we hope that our investment in the recording studio will serve to reinforce the links between us.

THORN EMI

Claire Baker is the THORN EMI PR Manager. We would like to thank her for writing this article and for her company's generosity in supporting the Academy's new Recording Studio.

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